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ABSTRACT

Samples of classroom activities designed to provide practice in specific test-taking skills are provided for use by teachers in the New York City school system. This guide provides activities that aid children in following instructions, time management, use of separate answer sheets, answer choice, and scanning and skimming. Unacceptable teaching practices mentioned briefly include the use of tests as teaching materials, familiarizing students with specific test content, and departing from test restrictions such as standard time limits. Copies of the exercises are included. (TJH)

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TEST-TAKING SKILLS

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OFFICE OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT
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FOREWORD

Our students are faced with the need to take a variety of tests for equally varied purposes, e.g., PEP tests, Preliminary and Regents Competency Tests (PCT, RCT), standardized norm-referenced tests, e.g., CAT, LAB, ITBS.

Of course, the best preparation for any test is a thorough grounding in the subject or field to be tested. However, in addition, test-taking skills will help to relieve anxiety and assist students in revealing their true knowledge and abilities. Such test-taking skills lend themselves to classroom practice, under the leadership of informed teachers who are equipped with paradigmatic materials and methods. We are attempting, in this booklet, to provide such information and suggestions in the service of both teachers and students.

We believe that a great deal can be done to help students to perform to the best of their abilities on standardized tests, whether they are norm-referenced or based on an "absolute" scale. One way to promote this desired optimum performance is to familiarize students with test formats; another is to develop the skills required to function successfully within those formats.

Specific drills in test-taking techniques and strategies need to be incorporated in a planned series of classroom exercises. It is recommended that preparatory exercises be practiced by your students as needed, according to the familiarity with the test format, and under test-like conditions. Practice sessions may begin early in the school year; and the two weeks prior to the actual testing could contain practice sessions scheduled every day.

Test-taking skills and techniques correlate well with other academic skills, and optimally they will be an integral part of a teacher's ongoing learning program. Equally optimal is the recognition that a student who is at ease in a testing situation is a more effective test-taker, even as the student who is at ease in a learning situation is the more effective learner. By reducing the number of unfamiliar situations a student will encounter in a testing experience, we can decrease the related anxiety of that student.

Charlotte Frank

Executive Director

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The booklet was prepared by Ida Echevarria, Director of the Office of Testing; Ronald LeDonni, Test Utilization Officer; Anita Wilkes Dore, Director, and Muriel Mandell, WEDGE Coordinator, of the Communication Arts Unit.

The practice exercises were prepared by District Test Liaisons.

Marie Bobetsky, of the Curriculum and Production Unit, provided editorial services.

INTRODUCTION

The elements that will permit students to score successfully in reading comprehension portions of tests require practice in communication arts activities such as writing, choral speaking, dramatics, poetry reading, storytelling (by teacher and by student). Give opportunities for silent reading to the students. Test situations demand of the test-taker extended periods of uninterrupted silent sustained reading (U.S.S.R.). The use of more effective questioning techniques and, as the research supports, more time spent on the task of reading will also improve comprehension skills.

There are other techniques which children need to know and use to facilitate coping with the many kinds of tests to which they will be exposed. A sampling of such strategies has been selected and follows.

Included first is the ability to follow directions, both oral and written. This skill relates not only to instructions in the test items, but to directions about marking answers, using answer sheets, making corrections or revisions, using scrap paper in mathematics tests, and budgeting time, where time limits are in effect.

A section on the effective management of time follows. Although the Degrees of Reading Power Tests and the PEP, PCT, and RCT tests will not be timed in the same sense as the California Achievement Tests, it is nevertheless advisable that students learn to budget their time wisely.

Practice in the use of separate answer sheets is most important. Again, as in the practice of all test-taking skills, make sure that the content is well within the scope of the test-taker, so that the focus can remain on the process itself.

Choosing the best answer is essentially an exercise in reading comprehension and will vary with the type of test format.

For the upper grades particularly, cultivation of the art of skimming and scanning can be helpful in reading purposefully and locating answers to questions.

TEST-TAKING SKILLS

This section will outline samples of classroom activities to provide practice in the specific test-taking skills previously described. They are only a guide. Feel free to improve those presented and to create others of your own. Share with your colleagues what you have done, and they will share with you. This mutual sharing will accrue to the overall benefit of those most closely involved with test-taking -- our students.

ACCEPTABLE PRACTICES

Following Directions - Oral and Written

- Practice with students the skills of listening to and following oral directions.
- Practice with students the skills of reading and following written directions.
- Give opportunities to understand the task involved in a test item.
- Give opportunities to practice recording a test item answer.
- Practice with students the technique of adjusting to different instructions, often within the same section or exercise. (Synonyms and Antonyms)
- Practice using key or direction words which appear frequently in test directions (locate, identify, underline, etc.).

Managing Time Effectively

- Acclimate students to working within simulated test conditions.
  - Start with short tests; build toward longer ones.
  - Use timed exercises; make time notations on the chalkboard to indicate time elapsed and/or time remaining.
  - Place a sign on the classroom door indicating that testing is in progress. Minimize outside interruptions.
  - Do not allow students to converse with each other during the exercise. Sustain the effort related to the task assigned.
  - Establish the procedure of raising hands if assistance of the teacher (broken pencil, leaving the room, inadequate lighting, etc.) is required.

Strategies for Better Comprehension

- Give opportunities for directed silent reading activities.
- Familiarize students with words that signal specific types of context clues.
- Give students practice in finding the referents (antecedents).
- Instruct students in the skill of bridging the gap between literal and extended or inferential meaning.

Using Separate Answer Sheets

- Practice as often as possible with simulated separate answer sheets.
- Check that children become totally familiar with filling in demographic information.
- Teach as sight words those which appear routinely on separate answer sheets. Such words as name, school, class, date, and teacher's name must become familiar to students who will be required to fill out separate answer sheets.
- Familiarize students with the process of filling in answer sheets completely with a No.2½ or softer lead pencil. Also practice erasing a mark completely before changing an answer.
- During practice exercises, take note of students who are using too much time coloring in the spaces "completely" and clarify the instructions.
- Emphasize that No.2 pencils are required on all tests that are electronically scanned for scoring.
- Emphasize the necessity for entering each answer in its proper position on the answer sheet. Demonstrate how one misplaced answer will affect the placement and scoring of all subsequent answers.
- Apprise students that stray marks on an answer sheet (including erasures) must be removed completely before the sheet is collected for scoring.

Choosing the Best Answer

- Have students read the questions related to a selection before they read the selection itself. This will establish a purpose for reading and will help them retain an idea of what types of information are required to answer the questions. (Not applicable to DRP-type tests)
- Practice with students the concept of selecting the "most correct" answer to a test question. Well-constructed tests will contain a number of answers that are close to being correct, or "look" correct.

Skimming and Scanning

- Teach students the mechanics of scanning for the correct answer to some types of questions.
- Demonstrate how skimming can increase the number of questions a student can answer in a prescribed period of time.
- Combine skimming and scanning with prereading of questions for optimal test performance.

TEST-TAKING SKILLS

UNACCEPTABLE PRACTICES

Teaching for the Test

- Never use standardized tests of any kind, regardless of form, level, and edition, as teaching material to prepare pupils for tests.

Familiarizing Students with Specific Test Content

- The use of vocabulary lists of words which are to appear on a standardized test is unethical, and interferes with test reliability and validity.

Orienting Pupils to Test Conditions Through Use of Standardized Test Material

- Such coaching on content is not a productive teaching method. Further, it constitutes test abuse. Teacher-prepared material is to be used.

Departing From Directions

- Extending time limits or prompting pupils on items is improper.
- Ignoring directions and/or going beyond them may result in penalty to the student.

Test-Taking Skill: FOLLOWING ORAL DIRECTIONS

Level: GRADES 2 AND 3

Aim: To recognize the cue words in oral and written instructions, and to follow the directions.

Part I: Teacher provides ongoing leadership throughout testing situation.

Examiner Instructions: Read a word aloud and ask the students to identify the word that has the same beginning sound.

Ask the students to fill in the space that goes with the answer word they chose, being sure to complete blackening the space and to remain within its limits.

1. SAY: Find the word that has the same beginning sound as the word "cake"....."cake."

   0 cereal
   0 car
   0 circus

2. SAY: Find the word that has the same beginning sound as the word "ship" ....."ship."

   0 stove
   0 small
   0 shoe

Part II: Teacher gives initial directions; then students follow independently.

Examiner Instructions: Ask the students to read a word to themselves and to note the underlined part. They are to find the word that has the same vowel sound as the underlined part.

Ask the students to fill in the space that goes with the answer they chose, being sure to complete blackening the space and to remain within its limits.

3. gave 0 had 0 tall 0 barn 0 base

4. SAY: Find the word that has the same vowel sound as the word "bed"....."bed."

   0 car 0 met 0 black 0 hear

5. SAY: Find the word that has the same vowel sound as the word "choice."

   0 chop 0 boy 0 change 0 best

detach here to make master

Test-Taking Skill: FOLLOWING ORAL DIRECTIONS Level: GRADES 2 AND 3

Aim: To understand that there may be different directions on the same page.

Oral Directions #1-4: Read each numbered phrase. Look at the underlined word and think about its meaning. Now read the words below it. Find the word that means the same as the underlined word. Fill in the space that goes with the word you chose. Make sure your pencil marking completely covers the space you are blackening.

SAMPLE A

good idea

0 joke
0 secret
0 story
0 thought

STOP

1. a small town

0 village
0 garage
0 boat
0 wagon

2. a loud sound

0 friend
0 noise
0 boy
0 train

3. a tall building

0 hut
0 train
0 skyscraper
0 mailbox

4. a new jacket

0 car
0 furniture
0 coat
0 toys

STOP

Oral Directions #5-9: Read each numbered phrase. Look at the underlined word and think about its meaning. Now read the words below it. Find the word that means the opposite of the underlined word. Fill in the space that goes with the word you chose. Make sure your pencil marking completely covers the space you are blackening.

5. small dog

0 happy
0 quiet
0 jumping
0 big

6. the girl laughed

0 cried
0 wanted
0 jumped
0 sang

7. the new box

0 big
0 gone
0 old
0 gone

8. he liked the dog

0 chewed
0 read
0 went
0 hated

9. the morning sun

0 evening
0 street
0 truck
0 noise

STOP

Detach here to make master.

Test-Taking Skill: FOLLOWING ORAL DIRECTIONS

Level: GRADES 2 AND 3

Aim: To develop in children an awareness of different types of designs in various test units.

Oral Directions: Read the first word in each numbered item. Now read the words next to it. Find the word that can be added to the first word to make another new word. Fill in the space that goes with the answer you choose.

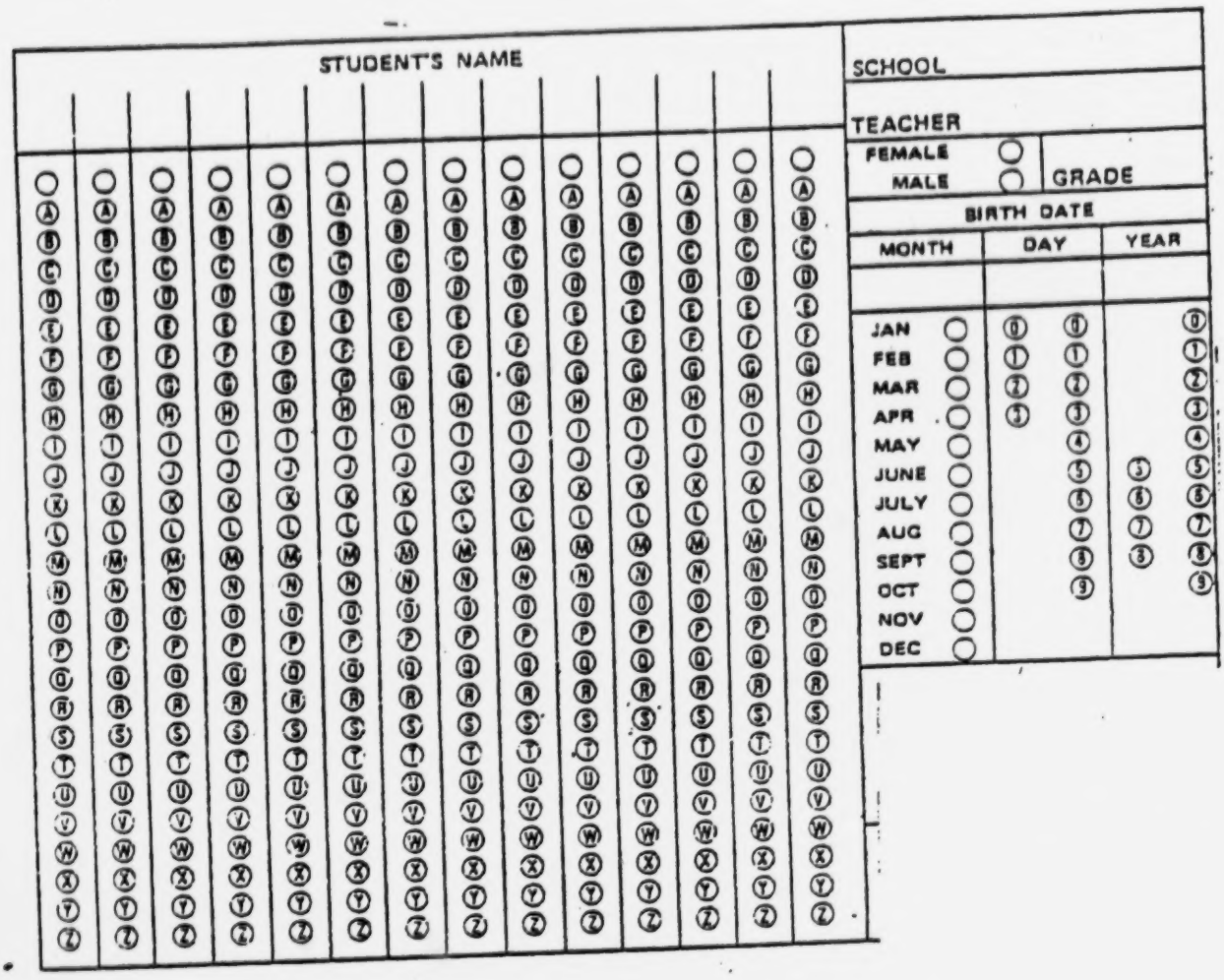
Sample Item

air	0 fly	0 bird	0 park	0 plane

1. some	0 play	0 thing	0 car	0 house	
2. fire	0 red	0 fly	0 burn	0 hot	
3. cow	0 milk	0 animal	0 boy	0 farm	
4. down	0 up	0 there	0 town	0 place	
5. any	0 boy	0 where	0 person	0 toys	
6. sun	0 shiny	0 yellow	0 round	0 light	
7. foot	0 ball	0 body	0 five	0 toes	
8. house	0 pretty	0 big	0 wife	0 old	
9. head	0 hair	0 strong	0 brown	0 body	
10. water	0 swim	0 fish	0 fall	0 pond	

Detach here to make master.

This answer sheet may be used for practice with the two following exercises.



READING VOCABULARY

SAMPLE

C ⓐ ⓑ ⓒ

1 ⓕ ⓖ ⓗ ⓘ

2 ⓐ ⓑ ⓒ ⓓ

3 ⓕ ⓖ ⓗ ⓘ

4 ⓐ ⓑ ⓒ ⓓ

5 ⓕ ⓖ ⓗ ⓘ

6 ⓐ ⓑ ⓒ ⓓ

7 ⓕ ⓖ ⓗ ⓘ

8 ⓕ ⓖ ⓗ ⓘ

9 ⓐ ⓑ ⓒ ⓓ

10 ⓕ ⓖ ⓗ ⓘ

11 ⓐ ⓑ ⓒ ⓓ

12 ⓕ ⓖ ⓗ ⓘ

13 ⓐ ⓑ ⓒ ⓓ

Test-Taking Skill: USING SEPARATE ANSWER SHEETS Level: GRADE 4 AND UP

Aim: To practice using separate answer sheet with four choices in the test unit and four answer spaces on the answer sheet.

Detach here to make master.

For each numbered item, choose the word or phrase that means the same, or almost the same, as the underlined word. Then blacken the corresponding letter in the appropriate space on the answer sheet. Be sure to fill in the answer space completely with your pencil, and to keep the pencil marking within the limits of that space.

SAMPLE: to bind
C
(a) open
(b) border
(c) fasten

1. to feel indignant
(f) sweet
(g) selfish
(h) angry
(j) healthy

2. a savage lion
(a) untamed
(b) tired
(c) hungry
(d) wise

3. to carve the meat
(f) chill
(g) eat
(h) slice
(j) grab

4. an island is
(a) a big lake
(b) land surrounded by water
(c) a thirsty camel
(d) a peninsula

5. an old fable
(f) a story that is made up
(g) a place for horses
(h) a kind of food
(j) a poem

6. a few apples remain
(a) are left
(b) fall down
(c) are eaten
(d) fall down

7. the barn gave shelter
(f) money
(g) food
(h) protection
(j) belief

Test Taking Skill: USING SEPARATE ANSWER SHEETS Level: GRADE 4 AND UP

Aim: To practice using separate answer sheet with three choices in the test unit and four answer spaces on the answer sheet.

Choose the sentence in which the underlined word has exactly the same meaning as the word given. Blacken the corresponding letter in the space provided on the answer sheet. Be sure to fill in the answer space completely with your pencil, and to keep the pencil marking within the limits of that space.

8. strict
   (f) The winter frost made the ground very hard.
   (g) The teacher was very hard with the student.
   (h) He found the math test very hard.

9. brain
   (a) Use your head to figure out the answer.
   (b) He wanted to be the head of the committee.
   (c) She was at the head of the class.

10. feeling
   (f) He lived in the heart of town.
   (g) When he became frightened his heart began to pound.
   (h) She sang the song with so much heart that people began to cry.

11. powerful
   (a) Her voice sounded very husky from her cold.
   (b) The husky football player knocked down the runner.
   (c) The husky pulled the sled.

12. to create
   (f) Of what make is his car?
   (g) You can't make me do that.
   (h) She tried to make a beautiful statue.

13. to celebrate
   (a) The principal came in to observe the teacher.
   (b) We will observe Washington's Birthday on Monday.
   (c) Observe the traffic laws to avoid getting a ticket.

Detach here to make master

Test-Taking Skill: CHOOSING THE BEST ANSWER

Level: GRADES 2 AND 3

Aim: To listen for key words in oral instructions which signal the meaning of the questions.

Oral Instructions: Each of the items you will be reading contains three sentences telling about things that might or might not be likely to happen.

In each numbered group of sentences, find the one that tells about something you think might really happen. Mark the space that goes with that sentence with your pencil, being sure to fill in the outline completely. Do not go beyond the space provided for each answer.

SAMPLE:
- O The flowers washed their petals.
- O The children ate their lunch.
- O The chairs marched around the table.

1.
- O The cow jumped over the moon.
- O The animals caught the stars.
- O Baby drank the milk and fell asleep.

2.
- O The lake waved to the children.
- O They heard the butterflies laugh.
- O They saw the fish in the lake.

3.
- O The piano danced around the room.
- O Children danced to the music.
- O The bell walked into the classroom.

4.
- O The fish sat on the rock.
- O The waves smiled at the fish.
- O The waves made a loud noise.

5.
- O The kitten began to purr.
- O The kitten poured the milk.
- O The milk ran to the kitten.

Detach here to make master.

Test-Taking Skill: STRATEGIES FOR BETTER COMPREHENSION Level: GRADES 2 AND 3

Aim: To practice identifying signal words and phrases which can guide and refine comprehension.

Teachers could choose or write selections of varying lengths and difficulty. Questions could be generated which tap the several areas of reading being tested: vocabulary in context, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension.

Focus attention, in both the selections and the questions, upon signal words and phrases. This will help in locating and choosing correct responses to questions.

Examples of Use of Signal Words and Phrases	Skill Area
1. Another name for a person is a human being.	Vocabulary in context; definition by direct statement
2. In this story, which of the boys went first?	Literal comprehension; sequence
3. The clock stopped working because it fell and broke.	Literal comprehension; cause and effect
4. From the story, you can tell that ____.	Inferential comprehension; drawing conclusions.

Detach here to make master

Test-Taking Skill: SCANNING

Level: GRADE 4 AND UP

Aim: To increase rate of speed in rapid reading for specific facts and figures.

Teacher uses an automatic timer or a 3-minute hour glass.

Oral Directions: Read the following selection silently and then, at my signal, scan quickly for the answers to the questions listed below. Mark the answer column in the space that goes with the answer you have chosen.

Work as quickly as you can. I will stop you at the end of three minutes.

"Comparative figures show that the 20th century has not eliminated 19th century problems. In 1900, nearly two-thirds of the city's population lived in 'tenement houses.' A total of 2,372,079 New Yorkers lived in 82,652 tenement buildings. Manhattan had 42,700 tenements; Brooklyn, 33,771; the Bronx, 4,365; Queens, 1,398; and Richmond, 418. In the year 1978, 186,000 apartment units were still being rented in some 27,000 Old-Law Tenements throughout the city; 125,000 units in Manhattan; 56,000 in Brooklyn; 4,000 in the Bronx; 2,000 in Queens; and fewer than 500 such units in Richmond."

Answer Column

1. In the year 1978, there were the following number of tenements in New York:

   a. 33,771
   b. 82,652
   c. 1,398
   d. 27,000

   1. 0 a 0 b 0 c 0 d

2. In that year, there were many more apartment units than the number of tenement buildings. The total number of units was:

   f. 418
   g. 4,000
   h. 186,000
   j. 2,000

   2. 0 f 0 g 0 h 0 j

3. Two-thirds of the city's population lived in 'tenement houses' in the year:

   a. 1978
   b. 1900
   c. 1979
   d. 1981

   3. 0 a 0 b 0 c 0 d

Detach here to make master.